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World Music Series, Kane Mathis, kora, with Roshni Samlal, tabla, February 8, 2017

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World Music Series

Kane Mathis, kora,
with Roshni Samlal, tabla



Wednesday, February 8, 2017
8:00 p.m.
Harper Hall

Program announced from stage

The Kora

The kora is arguably the most complex chordophone of Africa. It is played in the westernmost part of Africa in Mali, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Senegal. Each of the regions has characteristic playing styles and to some extent a region can be deduced from specific repertoire, but they share quite a bit of repertoire as well. It is very common to hear the same song with a variety of regional variants. The people most famous for the development of the kora are the Mandinka of The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau. The kora is made from a calabash gourd that has been cut in half with a hardwood post that runs through it to which the strings are attached. The calabash is covered with a cowhide that is stretched over the open side and then left in the sun to dry tight and hold the handposts in place. A tall bridge is mounted upright on the skin face of the instrument and separates the strings into two planes. The kora player supports the instrument with the third, fourth, and fifth fingers and the notes are played with the thumbs and forefingers of both hands. A kora can take up to a month to make in the hands of a skilled craftsman. When the craftsman is at the stage of stretching the skin over the calabash it can sometimes take up to three people to pull it properly.

A traditional kora has 21 strings but it is very common to see additions. The kora is strung with monofilament fishing line in varying thickness. In the days before monofilament was available, braided antelope hide was used and produced a sound less brilliant than the modern kora sound. The range of the kora is about 3 and 3/8 of an octave and is capable of highly contrapuntal textures. A kora musician may accompany his own voice or he may have a singer sing the vocal line while tapping the rhythm on the calabash. Kora repertoire may also be performed instrumentally. Since each kora song relies strongly on the vocal line, it is easy to discern a piece when it is played instrumentally. A good musician will bring out the vocal line in an instrumental rendering of a traditional piece and ornament it and play off of that line with soloistic runs called birimintingo. The ostinato pattern that the vocal line or birimintingo is performed over is called the kumbengo. The kumbengo is not an ostinato in the orthodox sense of being a repeating line but is usually a looping contrapuntal texture.

The Oud

The Oud is a half pear-shaped lute of North Africa and Asia Minor. It traces its origin back to pharonic times and its origin story is couched in myth as it was said to have been invented by Lamek, a 6th generation descendant of the Biblical Cain. The word “Oud” indicates that the lute has wooden face as opposed to a skin face as its predecessors did. The Oud is fretless and played with a plectrum in the right hand. Construction styles vary from region to region with Turkey, Armenia, and Greece sharing one family of tunings and the Arab and Jewish players generally using a slightly different style of construction and a lower tuning. Repertoire of ornamentation and interpretation vary from region to region although a lot of repertoire is shared. For example, one recording of the faculty of the Tunisian conservatory features a program heavily populated by Turkish composers.

Near eastern classical music consists of a single melody line that is performed by as many musicians as are on hand, this could be one or 50 with traditional chamber ensembles being around 5 -10 people. There is essentially no functional harmony used although the performers in an ensemble will create spontaneously generated variations in heterophonic style. The theory system of near eastern music utilizes a modal system called “makam.” A makam is a confluence of pitch material and composition rules. There are hundreds of makams.

Performer Bios

Brooklyn-based Kane Mathis is active internationally as a performer, composer, and educator. Specializing in music of West Africa and the Middle East, Mathis has a broad range of experience in traditional and contemporary contexts. His recorded and live performances have won him enthusiastic praise from music lovers and scholars alike.

Mathis began his musical career at age 16 playing blues and jazz clubs in Chicago before going to the Lawrence Conservatory of Music to study jazz and classical guitar. Simultaneously Mathis began making trips to The Gambia, Africa, to live with a family of hereditary musicians, which he has done for the past 20 years. Mathis holds a diploma from the Tiramang Traditional music school in The Gambia and has performed for the President of The Gambia, the American Ambassador to The Gambia and he has appeared on Gambian National Radio and Television. In 2011

Mathis became the first non-African to be endorsed by the country's National Center for Arts and Culture.

Mathis is also one of the leading interpreters of Ottoman classical music having studied with Mutlu Torun of Istanbul's I.T.U. conservatory before beginning a five-year apprenticeship with oud virtuoso Münir Nurettin Beken. As a composer Mathis is regularly commissioned to create original works for dance, theatre and instrumental ensembles. He has created numerous works for dance over the past 10 years with newer works focused on electronic fixed media. Mathis is a 2010 Earshot Jazz album of the year winner and a recipient of the 2012 Chamber Music America grant.

www.kanemathis.com

Roshni Samlal is a New York-based tabla player originating from Trinidad, WI, where she was initiated into the tradition of Indian classical music at the age of 5, into the academic community of “Bharatiya Vidya Sansthan,” taught by the Hindusthani classical theorist and composer, Professor H. S. Adesh, both in vocal performance and tabla. Since 1998 he has continued her tutelage in the Benares style of tabla playing under Shri Tapan Modak and is currently a student of the epic Farukhbad exponent Pt. Anindo Chatterjee and the masterful Punjab/Benares. While her passion is Indian classical tabla, Roshni has performed in many collaborative settings in creating scores for films and playing for kirtan singers such as Snam Kaur and Nina Rao. Roshni has had the opportunity to accompany maestros in the Hindustani classical world, such as Pt. Subrata Roy Chaudhuri, Steve Gorn. Roshni is an actively performing member of the innovative collective, the Brooklyn Raga Massive and teaches in the NY area.